The Trinity in the Old Testament

by

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The Little Plant That Grew

One of the greatest events in all human history was the moment when Abraham received the call from God to leave home and kindred and migrate to the Promised Land.

What God actually did was this: He took the seed of monotheism and planted it in the heart of one man. In order to permit it to grow and not to be choked by the weeds of idolatry, He transplanted that man, Abraham, from a pagan background into the better soil where the faith in God grew and spread, until today it covers almost the whole earth. Now people recognize the fact that it was Israel's privilege to make the knowledge of one true God available to all the world.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord"—Deuteronomy 6:4.

These words constitute the slogan, the motto, the war cry, to which the Jews the world over rally.

The three greatest religions are monotheistic: Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. All three base their monotheism on the Old Testament. Yet a closer study reveals a decided difference between them. In fact, the average Jew would deny that Christianity is monotheistic. "Do not Christians believe in three Gods, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit"? That the Jew is mistaken in thinking thus is admitted by no less an authority than Claude Montefiore, one of the greatest of Jewish theologians, scientists and philosophers. This great man said:

"I am well aware that in the purest and most philosophical presentation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, no infraction of the Divine Unity is intended. It will be needful for the Jewish theologian to consider anew the interpretation of the Trinity."

"Hear, O Israel . . . ."

Certainly the Founder of Christianity, Christ Himself, should be considered. When the scribes asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" (Mark 12:28,29), Christ gave the answer that any true Jew would give: "Shema Israel, Adonai, Elohenu, Adonai, echad", "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord"—Deuteronomy 6:4.

This the Jews call the "Shema", after the first word. Every true Christian believes in the Shema. Yet, although the Jews and the Christians can shout the Shema with equal fervor, there is a wide gulf between them, so far as the interpretation is concerned. Every Jew and Christian should inquire, not what interpretation is acceptable to the rabbi, priest, or minister, but rather, what interpretation is backed by the Word of God as a whole. But since the Jew who does not believe in Christ does not accept the authority of the New Testament, we will confine ourselves to the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tenach.

The Nature of the Trinity

The Torah, that is, the Old Testament, teaches in many ways that God is a plurality in unity. It would amaze you to know of the vast amount of proof there is in the Torah that God is a plurality. Names for God are in the plural. Descriptive names like Maker and Creator are in the plural, and adjectives, adverbs, and plural pronouns, such as "us" and "our." All these reveal God as a plurality, but a plurality in unity.

The very first name for God, found in the very first verse of the Bible (Genesis 1:1), Elohim, is in the plural form. The singular form is "El". Now the Scriptures use the singular form sparingly, but the plural, Elohim, is most numerous. When the term refers to the God of Israel, we translate it as if it were singular, "God". But when it refers to the heathen gods, it is translated in the plural, "gods". All this is strikingly revealed in the first two of the Ten Commandments. In Exodus 20:2 we read:

"I am the Lord, thy Elohim"—thy "God". Then in verse 3 we read: "Thou shalt have no other elohim before me". And here the same word, elohim, is

translated "gods". Then in verse 5 we note that Elohim calls Himself a "jealous God" and the Word for God here is "El", the singular form.

At this point the Jew might say, "Granted that the word Elohim is plural, can you prove that Moses himself looked upon the God of Israel as a plural?" To this the answer is unhesitatingly given, yes, but don't forget, a plurality in unity. The evidence is so overwhelming as to fill several good-sized books rather than this short treatise. Therefore, let him who reads multiply each illustration given in this small compass.

First, Moses understood God to be a plurality as shown by the fact that he used plural verbs in connection with Elohim. In Genesis 20, Moses records a conversation between Abimelech and Abraham, in which, in verse 13, Abraham said: "And it came to pass, when God (Elohim) caused me to wander (plural verb) from my father's house."

Again, in Genesis 35:7, we read: "And he (Jacob) built there an altar, and called the place El-beth-el: because there Elohim appeared (plural verb) unto him."

Another strong proof is the use of the plural personal pronoun in connection with Elohim. In Genesis 1:26 we read: "Elohim said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Here God refers to Himself as "us" and "our", plural pronouns. This is seen again in Genesis 3:22: "Behold, the man is become as one of us". In Genesis 11:7, in the account of the destruction of the Tower of Babel, God said, "Let us go down, and there confound their language."

Plural adjectives are also used to describe Elohim. In Deuteronomy 4:7, we read: "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh?" (plural adjective). In Joshua 24:19, Joshua refers to Elohim as a "holy God" and here the adjective "holy" is plural.

We shall get back to Moses in a moment, but let us take a quick look at such descriptive terms for God as Maker and Creator as used in other parts of the Scriptures. David used the word Maker in the plural in Psalm 149:2. Solomon used the term Creator in the plural in Ecclesiastes 12:1.

God Picks the Exact Word

But now let us return to Moses, and to the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4. When a Jew recites, as he so often does, "Shema, Israel, Adonai, Elohenu, Adonai, echad", "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord", he flaunts these words in the face of the Christian, like a Spanish bull-fighter flaunts his red cape in front of the bull. But in this case the bull tears the cape to pieces and overcomes his opponent. The Shema, in other words, clinches the argument in favor of the Christian.

In the first place, the word for God is used three times in the Shema, and each time it is used in the plural. Secondly, the second word for God is Elohenu, "our God". The "nu" at the end of the word means "our" and is attached to a word to indicate that the word is plural. Thus Moses, who wrote the Shema at God's command, knew and believed that God is a plurality. Now we come to the third and most conclusive proof in the Shema, namely the use of the word "echad", meaning one.

There are two words for "one" in the Hebrew language: echad (אחד), and yachid (יחיד). "Echad" is a compound unity, meaning several or many in one. "Yachid" is an absolute unity, meaning absolutely and indivisibly one. The term "echad", the compound unity, is derived from a verb which is found only once in all Scripture, in Ezekiel 21:21 (Leeser, Jewish translator). It is "Yachad", meaning "to unite oneself, to gather one's strength or forces". Gathering, combining, uniting, denotes plainly that several things are being united into one, and that is exactly what "echad" in the Shema teaches.

Now I shall give some other Bible illustrations of the use of echad. In Genesis 1:5 the evening and the morning constitute one day: two becoming "one"—echad. In Genesis 2:24, God declares that when a man marries a woman the two become "one"—echad. In Numbers 13:23 we read that the spies who went into the promised land brought back "a branch with one cluster of grapes" or many grapes in "one" cluster —echad.

In Judges 20:1,8,11, we find that "all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation was assembled as 'one' (echad) man". Again, "And all the people arose as one man." And again, "All the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one (echad) man." Thus I have proven that "echad" in its origin and usage is a compound unity.

Now I want to show that yachid (יחיד), the other Hebrew word for one, is used as an absolute unity. In Genesis 22:2,12,16, God says three times to Abraham, "Take thy son, thine only son". Literally, "thine only one son". It is used similarly with regard to Jephthah's daughter, in Judges 11:34—"She was his only child". In Psalm 68:6 it is translated "solitary". In Proverbs 4:3 it is rendered "only beloved". In Jeremiah 6:26, Amos 8:10, and Zechariah 12:10, it is translated "only son", literally "an only one".

There is a great deal of confusion in millions of Jewish minds concerning the two words "echad", a compound unity, as we have proven above; and "yachid" which means "the only one", or absolute unity.

This confusion is due to a large extent to a man who otherwise is of great stature, the famous Rabbi and philosopher Maimonides. It was he, who, without justification in the Word of God, has taken the Old Testament "echad" which describes the unity of God, and substituted the unscriptural description of the unity of God, "yachid". This has caused endless misunderstanding and confusion and unfortunately prevails even to the present day.

Now I should like to have every Jewish person who reads this treatise to answer three questions, carefully and frankly.

1. Why is it that this word "yachid", which is used so forcefully as an absolute unity, and which is found hundreds of times in the Bible, is not used even once to denote the oneness of God?

2. Why is it that when God through the prophets rebuked Israel for idolatry and sought to win the Jews back to the worship of the one true God, He never once used the word "yachid", the term which denotes absolute unity?

3. Why is it that the Talmud, the Hebrew prayer books, the creed that Moses Maimon gave to the Jews, and vast stores of rabbinical literature, use "yachid",

the absolute unity, to describe the oneness of God, when the Shema does not use it, and when it can nowhere be found in the Hebrew Scriptures—not even once—to describe the unity of God?

A Rabbi Who Believed in the Triune God

Several years ago I was used of God to lead an orthodox rabbi to Christ. But before he surrendered we had some terrific battles. One of them was regarding the Trinity. At Mount Hermon, California, one day he said to me, "Zutrau, you ought to read a book that every orthodox rabbi studies; it is on the unity of God". "Repeat that word for 'one' in the title, Rabbi," I said. He answered "yachid". I countered with "Is that word used in the Shema?" He hesitated a moment and then said, "No, it is not". Then I opened the Word of God and showed him what I have been showing you. And this man, whose father had been a rabbi in Palestine, and who himself grew up in Palestine, and had been a rabbi for 38 years, learned for the first time that the God of Israel is a compound unity, a plurality in unity. And from there he went on to find and believe in the Trinity.

The Trinity Is Not a New Testament Invention

The Trinity is as clearly revealed in the Old Testament as in the New. Christ and His apostles and disciples did not concoct this doctrine but derived it from the Hebrew Scriptures. First, they, like any Jew who believes in God at all, looked upon God as Father—Jeremiah 31:9, Psalm 68:5, Psalm 89:26. The stumbling block to the Jew is the second person of the Trinity, the Son.

Here are some Old Testament portions which tell of the Father and the Son. Look at the second Psalm. This is clearly a Psalm of the Messiah, for the term Moshiach is in the second verse, in the Hebrew. In the seventh verse God says to the Messiah "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee". "Begotten" means that God is actually His Father. In the twelfth verse of Psalm 2, God declares: "Do homage to the Son, lest He be angry, and ye be lost on the way. Happy are all they that put their trust in Him". (We have purposely avoided quoting this passage from the Christian translation, known as the King James Version. But rather have quoted an unassailable Jewish authority, Leeser.)

God: The Father and the Son

In Isaiah 9:6 we read, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace". Here is another prophecy recognized by the Hebrew authorities as referring to the Messiah. The Jewish Encyclopedia states that Isaiah 9:6 is the most important reference to the Messiah. Yet this prophecy definitely states that this child, born as a human being, is a Son given—that God gave Him. "He gave His only begotten Son". This Son is called "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father". Here you have the Son of God and the Everlasting Father, both one and the same. That is why Jesus said in John 10:30, "I and my Father are one". In Proverbs 30:4 the question is asked with reference to God, "What is his son's name, if thou canst tell?"

. . . And the Holy Spirit

Now I want to point out some portions of Hebrew Scripture which show that God is not only the Holy Spirit, but also that the Holy Spirit is a personality—a personality who is one of a Trinity of personalities.

Let us look first at Isaiah 48, beginning with verse 12. We read: "Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I am he; I am the first, and I also am the last". Then in verse 16, God says: "Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord God, and his Spirit, hath sent me". Here we have the Trinity definitely stated in the Hebrew Scriptures: "The Lord God", "The Spirit", and the Person who does the speaking, who calls Himself "Me", "The First and the Last" in verse 12; the "Creator" in verse 13; the "Redeemer" in verse 17. So you see here the Lord God, the Redeemer, and the Spirit.

Isaiah 61 is recognized by the Hebrew authorities as a prophecy of the Messiah. In verse one the Messiah declares: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me (Messiah means anointed) to preach good tidings" (the term Gospel is derived from good tidings). Here we have the Trinity again.

Now turn to Isaiah 63:8-16. In these verses we find God mentioned three times as Saviour; three times as the Holy Spirit; and twice as the Father. I was about to include the fact that God is called Redeemer twice, but some sharp eyes might wish to correct me and say God is called Redeemer once, and that I must have mistakenly included the Angel of His Presence, of Whom it is said He saves and redeems. Did I make a mistake? Let us concentrate on "The Angel of His Presence" and see.

Jacob Wrestles with God

In Genesis 31:11,13, we meet one who is called the "Angel of God". But this Angel calls Himself God. In Genesis 32 we see this Angel again. In verse 24 we are told that Jacob wrestled with a man. But in verse 28 we are informed that Jacob wrestled with none other than God. Then, to commemorate this wonderful experience, Jacob calls this place Peniel (face of God) "For", says he, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." If any Jew cringes when he reads that one can see God and live, then hold your breath when you read what is written by Moses himself in Exodus 24:9-11. In these verses Moses declares that he and Aaron, and Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders saw the God of Israel, and they saw Him in bodily form.

The Messiah Is God Manifest in Flesh

A moment ago we read of Jacob wrestling with a man who turns out to be God himself. To Abraham also God came as a man, as we read in Genesis 18. As a further proof that God did come to Abraham as a man, we find God eating the food which Abraham set before Him. Thus the Angel of God, who is God, appeared to both Abraham and Jacob as a man. So far we have seen that the Angel of God, who is God, appeared in the Old Testament times as a man. That being the case, why should the Jew find it so difficult to believe that the Messiah was none other than God manifested in the flesh? Let the Jew face squarely such a prophecy as Malachi 3:1, where we read:

> "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the

messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts".

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, better known as Maimonides, of whom the Jews have the saying, "From Moses to Moses there was none greater than Moses", declares that Malachi 3:1 prophesies of the Messiah. His view on this passage is commony accepted by leading Hebrew authorities. This is all the more striking when you consider that the Messiah is called "Lord" in this prophecy. Note also that He is called "The Messenger of the covenant". The term, "messenger" in the Hebrew text is "Malach" which is the common word for "angel".

Thus we learn that the Messiah is the Angel, who is none other than God himself. He is the Angel who "saves" and "redeems", spoken of in Isaiah 63:9. Yes, indeed, the Messiah came to save and redeem. He is "The messenger of the covenant", the new covenant, prophesied and promised by God through Jeremiah 31:31,32. This new covenant (New Testament) is a covenant of redemption.

May God help you, my fellow Jew, to join and enjoy the fellowship and blessed privilege of those who pray to God the Father, in the name of the Messiah (Hebrew for Christ) and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, and only thus, you may know God as He truly is, your prayers will be heard and your spiritual hunger satisfied.

CHALLENGING LITERATURE
For Jews and Christians

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